First record of the Locust Finch *Ortygospiza locustella* in Kenya

On 31 August 1990 I made a visit to Alupe (0°30N, 34°08E), Busia district, western Kenya. While walking through an area of rank grassland approximately 6 km north of Alupe village I flushed a flock of *c.* 25 small birds which immediately reminded me a Quailfinches *Ortygospiza atricollis*. Although I only saw them for about 15 s as they flew 80 m or so, I knew they were not this species. First, the call was different—a series of rougher, less musical notes. Also, as they flew up none of the birds showed the white tips on the ends of the outer tail feathers so obvious in the Quailfinch.

I was able to see the birds very briefly through 10 x 40 binoculars and was struck by the fact that most of them appeared blackish above and white below. It was a species unfamiliar to me.

I approached the area where the flock had landed but was unable to see them on the ground. However, when they flew I had excellent views of them, including at least three adult males. These birds were black on the crown, mantle, belly and flanks; the face and breast was bright red and the wings bright orange. I concluded that this was a flock of Locust Finches, known in East Africa only from the Ufipa Plateau and Iringa Highlands of southern Tanzania (Britton 1980).

I flushed the flock again but unfortunately the birds flew over some bushes and disappeared. During this flight I saw that some of the females had dull orange/brown wing coverts, totally dark blackish upperparts and white underparts.

On consulting the literature that evening I found that the nominate race of southern Tanzania shows little white spotting on the upperparts. As the Alupe birds appeared blackish and unmarked above, they fit the description of the race *uelensis* known from Faradje in northern Zaïre, some 600 km north-west of Alupe.

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Terry Stevenson, Box 1051, Nakuru

Scopus 15: 133, April 1992 Received 29 October 1990

First record of the Black-billed Seed-cracker *Pyrenestes ostrinus* in Kenya

The Black-billed Seed-cracker *Pyrenestes ostrinus* is widespread in Uganda occurring from the western border with Zaïre east to the Sese Islands and parts of the Lake Victoria basin (Britton 1980). It is described as fairly common in the Kampala area (Carswell 1986). Further west it ranges across the continent to Ghana, south-west to northern Angola (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1973).

This species was reported in Kakamega Forest by C.D. Fisher in 1960 and was subsequently included by Williams (1967). However, there is no specimen and this record was rejected by Zimmerman (1972) and Britton (1980).

In the light of the above, it appears that the record given here is the first substantiated one for Kenya.

During a visit to Mungatsi (0°28N, 34°19E) on 22 December 1990 my attention was drawn to a brilliant red and black bird which flew ahead of me and disappeared into some thick bush. At the time I was leading an ornithological tour and told my clients to look out for this "interesting looking bird." Shortly afterwards the bird flew straight towards us and landed in a bush about 20 m away.

I immediately recognized it as an adult male Black-billed Seed-cracker, a species I know from eastern Zaïre. The bright red head with large grey bill and obvious white marks above and below the eye were outstanding. The red continued down across the breast and on to the flanks, the rump and upper parts of the tail were also red. All the remainder of the plumage was black. It was surprising that the bird as carrying a greass stem in its bill. After about 3 min of observation it disappeared deep into the bush and only re-appeared to immediately fly off about 5 min later.

We continued to wait and over the next half hour the bird returned to the bush four times, on each occasion carrying a fresh green blade of grass. It was watched by 13 observers through a variety of binoculars. Everyone agreed with the identification, the only likely confusion being with Red-headed Bluebill *Spermophaga ruficapilla*, but this species had been well seen by the group at Kakamega the previous day.

Finally, the bird we had all been watching flew out of the bush and surprised us all when a female followed it. This second bird was only only seen in flight, but the distinctive red and brown plumage was well seen. Although we waited a further half an hour neither bird returned.

We also tried to see a nest within the bush but a stream prevented us making a close approach and none could be seen from our position on the opposite bank. Neither bird was seen again during another visit three hours later.

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Terry Stevenson, Box 1051, Nakuru

Scopus 15: 133–134, April 1992 Received 29 October 1990